

**Wires 9/14/20**

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**US Blocks Goods Made in China's Xinjiang to Combat Forced Labor - Homeland Security**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has moved to block the import of goods made in China's Xinjiang to combat alleged forced labor practices, the Department of Homeland Security said on Monday.

"US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued five Withhold Release Orders today on products from the People's Republic of China," the department said in a statement. "The products subject to the WROs are produced with state-sponsored forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where the Chinese government is engaged in systemic human rights abuses against the Uyghur people and other ethnic and religious minorities."

Companies that ship clothing and other cotton goods, computer parts and hair products from the Xinjiang region were named in the order issued by the CBP.

"The series of actions CBP has taken against imports from China demonstrates the pervasive use of unethical and inhumane labor conditions in China, and CBP will not turn a blind eye," said Brenda Smith, Executive Assistant Commissioner of CBP's Office of Trade. "Allowing goods produced using forced labor into the U.S. supply chain undermines the integrity of our imports. American consumers deserve and demand better."

The United States is considering a broader ban on cotton and textiles and tomatoes from Xinjiang, said Ken Cuccinelli, the acting deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

Human rights groups say Chinese authorities have detained more than a million people — from mostly Muslim ethnic groups that include Uighurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz — in a vast network of detention centers as part of an assimilation campaign.

China has denied the charges, saying the camps it built for Uighurs and other minorities were for vocational and Chinese language training and not for slave labour.

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**Trump on Climate Change: 'It Will Start Getting Cooler, Science Doesn't Know Actually'**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said on Monday in response to officials' claims that climate change plays a role in the worsening wildfires in California that it will get cooler, but scientists do not actually know.

"It'll start getting cooler, you just watch," Trump told California's Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot during the roundtable in Sacramento.

Crowfoot told Trump that he wishes science agreed with him, to which the US president responded, "Well, I don't think science knows actually."

Earlier in the discussion, California Governor Gavin Newsom said climate change is real and is exacerbating the wildfires in the state. Newsom asked Trump to respect their differences in opinion on the climate change issue.

On Sunday, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said that a total of 22 people have so far died in the wildfires. More than 4,100 structures have been destroyed and more than 16,750 firefighters are working to contain the 29 major wildfires across California.

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**US May Set Anti-Dumping Duties on Chinese Glass Containers of Up to 256% - Commerce Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to impose permanent duties on imports of glass containers from China that in some cases would reach nearly 256 percent, pending a final ruling from the International Trade Commission (ITC) that US companies have been harmed by unfair competition, the Department of Commerce said in a press release on Monday.

"[The Department of] Commerce determined that exporters from China have dumped certain glass containers in the United States at margins ranging from 31.07 to 255.68 percent," in what the release called a "final determination."

Should the ITC rule that US industry had been hurt by sales of the Chinese containers, Commerce will impose duties based on the margins announced on Monday, the release said. The ITC ruling is scheduled for October 26.

The case against Chinese glass container makers stems from a complaint filed by the American Glass Packaging Coalition, which claimed its members were hurt by sales of the items at less than fair value - a practice known as dumping.

US trade law requires a determination by the quasi-judicial ITC that American industries have been harmed before the Commerce Department can impose penalties.

In 2019, US imports of Chinese containers targeted by the complaint were valued at \$293 million, according to the release.

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**US Lifts 'Do Not Travel' Advisory From China - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has lifted a "do not travel" advisory for China, the US State Department said in a statement on Monday in acknowledging the improved novel coronavirus conditions in the country.

"The Department of State updated the Travel Advisory Level for China to Level 3 - Reconsider Travel on September 14, 2020. This replaces the previous Travel Advisory issued on June 5, 2020," the statement said.

The State Department issued the same upgrade for Hong Kong as well.

The previous State Department advisory had placed China in the "Level 4: Do Not Travel" category of countries.

The statement pointed out that China has resumed most business operations, including day cares and schools, and noted that other improved conditions have been reported within the country.

However, the State Department said it recommends reconsidering visiting China due to the novel coronavirus as well as the arbitrary enforcement of local laws as well as arbitrary detention and exit bans to gain bargaining leverage over foreign governments.

China continues not to allow US citizens with proper visas or residence permits to enter its territory, the statement added.

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**Daimler Reaches \$1.5Bln Settlement With US Over Emissions Cheating - Justice Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - German automaker Daimler AG has reached a \$1.5 billion settlement with the US government for cheating on the legally established emissions standards in the United States, the Justice Department announced on Monday.

Daimler was under investigation for installing auxiliary emission control devices and defeat devices in Mercedes-Benz diesel vehicles sold in the United States between 2009 and 2016 in direct contravention of the Clean Air Act.

"Daimler will pay a civil penalty totaling \$875 million, which equates to about a \$3,500 penalty for each vehicle that was sold in the United States," Deputy US Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen said. "Together, the total cost to Daimler of these undertakings and other requirements is around \$1.5 billion."

In addition to the civil penalty, the Daimler will fix all of the affected vehicles, at an estimated cost of \$400 million, replace 15 old locomotive engines with a new low nitrogen oxide-emitting variant and commission an independent review of internal corporate compliance procedures.

Rosen noted that the settlement is the largest civil penalty per-vehicle imposed for contravening the Clean Air Act.

In recent years, the US government has launched several investigations into emissions standards cheating committed by major automakers. In 2017, Volkswagen AG paid a \$4.3 billion penalty for misleading regulators and consumers about its diesel engines' emissions, while Fiat Chrysler and Ford have also been investigated for potential violations.

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Pompeo Discussed Gulf Rift, Iran Threat With Qatari Foreign Minister - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discussed on Monday with Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani the need to resolve a dispute between Arab monarchies of the Gulf and further counter Iran's influence in the region, State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.

"They discussed the regional momentum to advance peace and prosperity, the need to overcome divisions within the Gulf and further combat Iran's destabilizing effect on the region, and Qatar's effort to support stability and economic development in Gaza," Ortagus said.

Pompeo and Al Thani, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, co-chaired their countries' delegations at the Third Annual US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue in Washington, DC.

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates severed relations with Qatar and imposed a blockade on the country over its support of Islamist groups that they view as terrorist organizations.

"To close the door to increased Iranian meddling, it's past time to find a solution to the Gulf rift. The Trump administration is eager to see this dispute resolved and to reopen Qatar's air and land borders currently blocked by other Gulf states," Pompeo said in his earlier remarks. "I look forward to progress on this issue."

He also praised Qatar for promoting stability in the Middle East through delivering multimillion aid to Gaza and taking part in regional efforts to de-escalate tensions in Syria and Lebanon. Pompeo thanked Qatar for hosting Afghan peace negotiations.

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Hurricane Sally Grows Stronger, Threatening US Coast - NHC

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Hurricane Sally, the second storm within three weeks developing off the US Gulf of Mexico, is expected to make landfall in the southeastern by Tuesday and is gathering wind speeds that could make it more dangerous, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) said on Monday.

"On the forecast track, the center of Sally will move over the north-central Gulf of Mexico today, approach southeastern Louisiana tonight, and make landfall in the hurricane warning area on Tuesday or Tuesday night," the NHC said in a bulletin warning about the storm. "Maximum sustained winds are near 90 mph (150 km/h) with higher gusts. Additional strengthening is forecast during the next day or so, and Sally is expected to be a dangerous hurricane when it moves onshore along the north-central Gulf coast."

Sally is the 18th named storm in the Atlantic this year and will be the eighth of tropical storm or hurricane strength to hit the United States, according to NHC records.

It comes less than three weeks after Hurricane Laura, one of the strongest US hurricanes in more than a century, made landfall near Cameron, Louisiana, on August 26 as a Category 4 storm. That hurricane, which killed at least 25 people and damaged countless property, also scored a near-direct hit on one refinery in Louisiana processing 769,000 barrels per day of crude oil.

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#### **Pennsylvania County Prosecutor Warns Against Rioting Over Police Shooting in Lancaster**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Rioting in the city of Lancaster in the state of Pennsylvania will not be tolerated following a fatal officer-involved shooting this past weekend, Lancaster County District Attorney Heather Adams said in a press release on Monday.

On Sunday, a police officer shot and killed 27-year-old Ricardo Munoz, who was charging the police officer while yielding a knife in a threatening manner, according to body camera footage released by the Lancaster Police Department.

"This office fully supports the right to gather and peacefully protest, however, the riotous behavior exhibited last night is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated," Adams said in the release. "Such lawless conduct only takes away from those working with the community to address issues worthy of discussion. Make no mistake, those who cannot peacefully protest and instead resort to violence will be prosecuted and held fully accountable."

Adams' office said numerous buildings and vehicles were damaged and fires were set during overnight riots in the city. Adams added that police officers arrested several individuals allegedly involved in the incidents and that charged would be filed against them.

Lancaster Mayor Danene Sorace said the police officer involved in the shooting has been placed on leave as the investigation into the shooting continues.

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#### UN Chief Firmly Condemns Iran's Execution of Wrestling Champion - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has strongly condemned the execution by Iranian officials of 27-year-old champion wrestler Navid Afkari who was accused of killing a security guard during the 2018 protests, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

Navid had been in custody since September 2018 before being executed by hanging this past Saturday.

"The Secretary-General has been very clear [on] his feelings against the use of the death penalty," Dujarric said. "He firmly condemns the use of the death penalty in this case, and in every other case that it's been used."

Many prominent politicians and rights activists worldwide had urged the Iranian government not to execute the young athlete. The execution triggered a broad international outcry.

Earlier in the day, a group of experts from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had also condemned the execution.

According to Iranian authorities, Afkari confessed to the murder while in custody. His family later claimed that the confession was forced out of him by torture.

The UN experts said that Afkari complained to the judiciary that the officials had severely beaten him, covered his face with a plastic bag, and poured alcohol into his nose.

"The execution of Navid Afkari was summary and arbitrary, imposed following a process that did not meet even the most basic substantive or procedural fair trial standards, behind a smokescreen of a murder charge," the experts said.

The family of the murdered security agent, Hasan Turkman, reportedly refused to replace the death penalty by restitution for Afkari.

According to OHCHR, Afkari's family was denied the right to last visit prior to execution. They had just arrived at Shiraz to seek pardon from the victim's family when they learned that Afkari's execution had been implemented on September 12.

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#### US to Block Imports of Goods Made in China's Xinjiang to Combat Forced Labor - DHS

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States has moved to block the import of goods made in China's Xinjiang to combat alleged forced labor practices, the Department of Homeland Security said on Monday.

"US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued five Withhold Release Orders (WRO) today on products from the People's Republic of China (PRC)," the department said in a statement.

"The products subject to the WROs are produced with state-sponsored forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where the Chinese government is engaged in systemic human rights abuses against the Uyghur people and other ethnic and religious minorities."

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**US Restricts Visas for Nigerian Officials Who Undermined Local Elections - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The US government imposed restrictions on Nigerian officials for alleged acts of violence and intimidation that marred elections in two states, the State Department said in a press release on Monday.

"Today, the Secretary of State is imposing additional visa restrictions on individuals for their actions surrounding the November 2019 Kogi and Bayelsa State elections and in the run up to the September and October 2020 Edo and Ondo State elections," the release said.

The release did not name the sanctioned officials but said they had "so far operated with impunity at the expense of the Nigerian people and have undermined democratic principles," the release added.

The penalties reflect a US commitment to help the Nigerian government follow through on a commitment to end corruption and strengthen democracy, accountability, and respect for human rights, according to the release.

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**US, Mongolia Agree to Hold Additional Talks on Boosting Trade Ties - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Senior US and Mongolian officials agreed to additional dialogue around enhancing trade ties between the two countries, the State Department said in a statement on Monday.

"The United States and Mongolia are united in our desire to boost our trade and investment ties and have agreed to an additional upcoming dialogue to solidify the economic partnership," the release said after their Annual Bilateral Consultation.

The session, held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was led by Assistant US Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific David Stilwell and Mongolia State Secretary N. Ankhubayar, the release said.

The release also noted growing bilateral cooperation on security issues, especially border protection and efforts to fight transnational crime. More than 1,000 Mongolian law enforcement and security personnel have completed training provided by the US.

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**UN Chief Hopes Israel-Bahrain Agreement Will Promote Regional Cooperation - Spokesman**

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres hopes that the agreement to establish diplomatic relations between Bahrain and Israel will help advance regional cooperation ahead of the signing ceremony on Tuesday, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric told reporters.

"The Secretary-General hopes that the signing ceremony tomorrow will create more opportunities for regional cooperation," Dujarric said during a press briefing on Monday. Dujarric pointed out that Guterres also expects Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations that will effectuate the so-called two-state solution under relevant UN resolutions and existing international agreements.

On Friday, Israel and Bahrain agreed to normalize relations. The two countries agreed to establish diplomatic ties a month after a similar landmark deal was brokered by the United States between Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

Bahrain became the fourth Arab country to recognize Israel. The first two were Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

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#### Nearly 9 of 10 Non-Republican Voters Say Trump Makes Protests in US Worse - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - A nearly 90 percent majority of Democrat and other non-Republican voters blame US President Donald Trump for making nationwide protests against police brutality worse, a new Monmouth University poll revealed on Monday.

"Most Americans (61 percent) say that Trump's handling of the protests has made the situation worse and just 24 percent say he has made it better," a press release summarizing the poll said. "Nearly 9 in 10 non-Republicans say Trump has made the situation worse, including 88 percent who are white, 87 percent who are Black, and 86 percent who are of another racial minority group.

Republicans and independent voters who lean Republican "stand alone in their feeling that the president has made the situation better (46 percent) rather than worse (30 percent)," the release said.

Protesters affiliated with left-wing anarchist groups have mounted nearly daily attacks on legal offices and police facilities, with occasional looting rampages against businesses in large US cities since the death of suspect George Floyd during an arrest in late May.

Ahead of the November 3 election, Trump has made law and order a key theme of his campaign for a second term, arguing that violent protestors should be punished.

The poll also showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans (65 percent) believe that racial and ethnic discrimination remains a "big problem" in the US, echoing a complaint of protestors that extends beyond the narrower issue of police treatment of minorities, the release said.

Just 18 percent say discrimination is not a problem at all and another 16 percent say that discrimination is a problem but not a big one, the release added.



Because the results nearly match those of surveys in June, the release said neither Trump nor his opponent, former Vice President Joe Biden, gains a clear edge from either law-and-order or racial issues driving the protests, according to the release.

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#### **Guterres to Meet Trump If He Comes to UN General Assembly In-Person - Spokesman**

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will meet US President Donald Trump in-person if the latter comes to the UN General Assembly next week, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press release on Monday. "Of course the Secretary-General will have a bilateral [meeting] if the President of the United States comes," Dujarric said when asked whether the two officials will hold a meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations high-level week.

However, Dujarric said he has no information on whether Trump will deliver his message to the UN General Assembly in-person or virtually.

Dujarric also said that later in the day, Guterres would write to Trump to express his condolences for the loss of life in the wildfires in California, Oregon, Washington and other US states.

The General Debate week of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly will start on September 22. Due to the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic, the event will mostly be held virtually, with world leaders submitting their pre-recorded messages in advance, instead of delivering them in-person at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

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#### **UNESCO Finds Drastic Increase in Violence Against Press Amid Global Protests - Report**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in a new report said it has found that there has been a drastic increase in violence against journalists covering protests around the world this year.

"Drawing on credible documentation from partners, UNESCO Field Offices and Member States, and triangulation of press reports, this report identifies 125 instances of attacks on or arrests of journalists covering protests in 65 countries between 1 January 2015 and 30 June 2020," the report said on Wednesday. "Among these, 15 took place in 2015; 16 in 2016; 21 in 2017; 20 in 2018; 32 in 2019; and 21 in the first half of 2020 alone, clearly indicating an upward trend in the number of attacks faced by journalists when covering protests."

At least ten journalists have been killed since 2015 while covering protests and violence against the press has occurred in at least 65 countries, the report said.

The report also found that most violence against the press is done by government security forces, but sometimes conducted by protesters as well. The report said that 82 percent of attacks against the press in the United States between May 26 and June 3 were allegedly committed by law enforcement agents.

Tactics used against journalists have violated international laws and norms agreed to under multilateral institutions, the report said.

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#### Nearly 90% of Non-Republicans Believe Trump Makes US Protests Worse - Poll

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"Most Americans (61%) say that Trump's handling of the protests has made the situation worse and just 24% say he has made it better," a press release summarizing the poll said. "Nearly 9 in 10 non-Republicans say Trump has made the situation worse, including 88% who are white, 87% who are Black, and 86% who are of another racial minority group."

Republicans and independent voters who lean Republican "stand alone in their feeling that the president has made the situation better (46%) rather than worse (30%)," the release said. Protesters the Justice Department alleges are affiliated with fringe left-wing anarchist groups have mounted nearly daily attacks on legal offices and police with occasional looting rampages against businesses in large US cities since the death of George Floyd during an arrest in late May.

Ahead of the November 3 election, Trump has made law and order a key theme of his campaign for a second term, arguing that violent protesters should be punished.

The poll also showed that nearly two-thirds of Americans (65 percent) believe that racial and ethnic discrimination remains a "big problem" in the US, echoing a complaint of protesters that extends beyond the narrower issue of police treatment of minorities, the release said.

Just 18 percent say discrimination is not a problem at all and another 16 percent say that discrimination is a problem but not a big one, the release added.

Because the results nearly match those of surveys in June, the release said neither Trump nor his opponent, former Vice President Joe Biden, gains a clear edge from either law-and-order or racial issues driving the protests, according to the release.

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#### Riyadh Calls on UN to Take Urgent Action on Decaying Oil Tanker in Yemen - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United Nations and the international community should take an immediate action to contain the risk of an explosion of the decaying oil tanker Safer, which is moored off the coast of Yemen, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) said in a press release on Monday.

"The KSrelief calls upon the United Nations and the rest of the international community to take urgent and immediate action to contain the risk of the explosion or sinking of the Safer oil tanker," the release said. "The tanker... is carrying more than a million and a half barrels of crude oil, and is at risk of creating a major oil spill in the Red Sea - an event which would cause a major environmental disaster in Yemen and other countries with Red Sea coastlines."

The center warned in the release that the tanker, which has not seen any adequate maintenance since 2015, is at risk of exploding at any time.

The United Nations has been waiting to receive final clearances to deploy a technical mission to the tanker from the Houthi authorities in control of nearby area since mid-August.

Earlier on Monday, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said there has been no update since then and the discussions with the Houthis are ongoing.

"It is vital that we move on this as quickly as possible because every day that there isn't positive news, it adds to the ecological and human risk of the tanker disintegrating or exploding," Dujarric said.

According to the United Nations, a potential oil leak into the Red Sea would severely harm the ecosystems in the region and will potentially affect some 30 million people.

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#### US House Dems Probe Trump Administration Efforts to Conceal COVID-19 Data

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Democratic lawmakers launched a probe on Monday into Trump administration efforts to prevent the release of accurate scientific data on the severity of COVID-19.

"We write to request transcribed interviews and documents regarding efforts by political appointees at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to block the publication of accurate scientific reports by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during the coronavirus crisis," the lawmakers on a House COVID-19 panel said in a letter to senior health officials.

All Democratic Members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, led by Chairman James Clyburn, sent the letter to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Robert Redfield and Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar.

The lawmakers said they are concerned over President Donald Trump's remarks in March that he concealed from the US public the true threat of COVID-19.

The lawmakers also drew concern from reports that Trump's political appointees at HHS sought to help him downplay the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic by trying to manipulate, delay or block important information from CDC.

The lawmakers have asked CDC and HHS to make certain high-level officials available for interviews and to produce all relevant records related to the issue by September 28.

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#### **Biden Casts Vote in Delaware's Statewide Primary Day Before Polls Open**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden and his wife Jill Biden on Monday cast early ballots in Delaware's statewide primary.

The Bidens were able to cast their votes before the polls formally opened on Tuesday because they will be on a campaign-related trip.

Asked if he was confident all votes will be counted in November, he responded "I have confidence that [President Donald] Trump will try to not have that happen, but I'm confident the American public is going to insist on it."

Biden leads by 7.5 percent nationally, a half-point bump from last week, according to the average of the most recent surveys published on poll aggregator Realclearpolitics.com as of Sunday evening.

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#### **California Leads Fight to Block Trump Plan to Scrap Methane Emission Limits - Statement**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - California is leading a legal challenge to the Trump administration's efforts to scrap federal limits on generating methane gas into the atmosphere, state Attorney General Xavier Becerra said in a press release on Monday.

"Becerra and the California Air Resources Board (CARB), leading a coalition of 24 states and municipalities, today filed a lawsuit challenging the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) final rule gutting standards that limit emissions of methane, volatile organic compounds, and other hazardous pollutants," the release said.

The gases and other pollutants are being generated from new, reconstructed and modified facilities in the oil and natural gas industry, the attorney general's office explained. Methane is a super-pollutant up to 87 times more potent than carbon dioxide in its ability to trap heat over a 20-year timeframe, the release said.

"The West is on fire, the South floods, the Midwest gets ripped apart by super-tornadoes, and the East prepares for calamitous hurricanes. The Trump administration ignores the dire reality of the climate crisis at our peril," Becerra said.

Children, older adults and those suffering from chronic lung disease and asthma will be especially at risk, the release said.

Scrapping the standards will increase emissions of methane by 850,000 tons between 2021 and 2030 - or 19 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, the release added.

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**Hackers Steal Healthcare Payments, Data From Up to 46,000 US Veterans - Agency**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Hackers stole personal data of 46,000 former US service members and used the information to divert government payments for veterans' medical services, the Veterans Administration (VA) said in a press release on Monday.

"The [VA] Financial Services Center (FSC) determined one of its online applications was accessed by unauthorized users to divert payments to community health care providers for the medical treatment of Veterans," the release said.

As a result, the FSC began alerting the affected individuals, including the next-of-kin of deceased veterans, of the potential risk to their personal information, and offered free credit monitoring services to those whose Social Security numbers may have been stolen, the release added.

Big data breaches so far this year include a hack that potentially affected more than 5 million customers of the Marriott Hotel chain in March and a June intrusion announced by Nintendo that compromised 300,000 user accounts, according to media reports.

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**US Invests \$115Mln to Combat Opioid Deaths During COVID-19 Crisis - Health Dept.**

WASHINGTON, August (September 14) - The US government awarded \$115 million in grants in August and September as part of a continuing effort to reduce deaths from opioid abuse amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said in a press release on Monday.

"The Trump administration continues to provide historic levels of support for Americans with substance use disorders, especially those in rural areas, because the COVID-19 pandemic hasn't put a pause on our country's opioid crisis," Health Secretary Alex Azar said in the release.

The \$115 million includes an additional \$25 million disbursed so far in September in grants to 80 recipients in 36 states as part of the HHS's Rural Communities Opioid Response Program, the release said.

The American Medical Association recently reported opioid-related deaths have continued to increase during, and possibly as a result of the novel coronavirus pandemic in 2020, particularly from illicitly manufactured fentanyl and fentanyl analogs.

In 2019, prior to the onset of the pandemic, the US authorities reported more than 50,000 opioid overdose deaths - an increase of nearly 5 percent despite a nationwide crackdown on legal prescriptions for opioid-containing drugs.

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**Pentagon Must Get Bureaucracy Out of Way to Speed US Military's Readiness - STRATCOM Chief**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) chief Charles Richard said during a press briefing on Monday that it is time for the Defense Department to get the bureaucracy out of the way in order to speed the military's readiness.

"It is time for us to start getting some of our bureaucracy out of our way and I think that is the fundamental thing that slows us down," Richard said regarding the US military's readiness.

Richard said the United States needs to be able to move fast to counter China's ability to quickly develop its military, especially its strategic forces.

Asked about journalist Bob Woodward mentioning in his book "Rage" that President Donald Trump has said the United States has a secret nuclear weapon, Richard referred the question to either Defense Secretary Mark Esper or the White House.

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**US Companies Able to Assist Qatar in Construction of LNG Projects - Commerce Secretary**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - US energy companies are well-positioned to provide services to Qatar in the construction of liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross said on Monday.

"The energy sector continues to present excellent opportunities for US companies," Ross said.

"US companies are well-positioned to provide technical expertise, equipment, and construction services to your major LNG projects."

Ross pointed out the North Field expansion project that is set to increase Qatar's LNG production capacity by 64 percent by 2027 from 77 million tons per year to 126 million.

Ross was speaking at a third annual US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue held in Washington, during which the sides are scheduled to discuss health security, military cooperation, civil aviation, investment and international development, among other issues.

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**US, Qatar Declare 2021 Mutual Year of Culture**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The United States and Qatar on Monday declared 2021 to be a mutual year of culture in an agreement hailed as a testament to advancing relations between the two states.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to "establish Qatar's 2021 year of culture with the United States."

"The MOU emphasizes our partnership has grown beyond just defense and economics into one of true friendship and community between our people and our two countries," Pompeo said during the US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue in Doha.

The document declares the US and Qatari governments' intention to enhance cultural and art exchanges, people-to-people connections, shared ideals of tolerance and diversity.

The two countries also agreed to hold an investment forum in 2021 in the United States which will facilitate "the exploration of new opportunities" for both states' companies.

The document was signed by US Secretary of Treasury Stephen Mnuchin and his Qatari counterpart. Mnuchin noted during the occasion that Qatar has invested more than \$30 billion in the United States and US companies have channeled \$10 billion in the Qatari economy.

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US Government to Review Oracle Proposal for TikTok in 'Next Couple Days' - Mnuchin

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - The White House is reviewing US software company Oracle's winning bid for TikTok and will decide in the next couple of days if the deal satisfies its requirements for the protection of the data of Americans using the Chinese video sharing app, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said Monday.

"We just got this proposal over the weekend," Mnuchin told reporters outside the White House. "It's going to go through a national security review in the next couple of days and then we'll be sitting down and reviewing it with the president. But as we said before, in condition of any deal, we must believe that the code is safe and that US citizens' personal data is safe, and we've a lot of confidence that Oracle will also be reviewing the technical issues with them."

The Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday that Oracle has won the bidding for the US operations of TikTok, beating out Microsoft Corp in a high-profile deal to salvage a social-media sensation that has been caught in the middle of a geopolitical standoff.

The exact nature of the agreement between TikTok and Oracle remains unclear, as it was not described as an outright sale. The news about Oracle came just after Microsoft announced that it will not buy TikTok's US operations from ByteDance.

The Trump administration had earlier said TikTok will be banned by September 20 if it did not sell itself to a US entity by then, prompting the owner Chinese company's parent ByteDance to sue the administration, saying it had taken extraordinary measures to protect the privacy and security of its user data.

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**Amazon to Add up to 100,000 New Jobs Across US, Canada – Company Statement**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) – Technology giant Amazon plans to create up to 100,000 new jobs across the United States and Canada, the company said in a statement on Monday.

“We are opening 100 buildings this month alone across new fulfillment and sortation centers, delivery stations, and other sites,” said Dave Clark, Amazon’s Senior Vice President of Worldwide Operations. “We are proud to be hiring 100,000 new associates with pay of \$15 per hour or more across those buildings and in our network.”

The announcement comes after the company said last week that it would create 33,000 corporate and technology openings, the statement said.

Jobs have been hard to come by in the US and Canada, where labor market has been bruised by the novel coronavirus pandemic. As of August, the unemployment rate totaled 8.4 percent in the US and 10.2 percent in Canada – markedly higher than the OECD rate of 7.7 percent in July.

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**RPT: REVIEW - Biden Gains Ground in Midwest Despite Trump’s ‘Law and Order’ Onslaught**

WASHINGTON, September 14 (Sputnik) - Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden gained ground in a couple key Midwest battleground states despite President Donald Trump’s efforts to stoke fear among white voters over social unrest, recent polling has revealed.

The former vice president leads by 7.5 percent nationally, a half-point bump from last week, according to the average of the most recent surveys published on poll aggregator Realclearpolitics.com (RCP) as of Sunday evening.

In recent rallies Trump has persistently tried to tie Biden to the nationwide riots that have erupted over police violence against Blacks. However, some pollsters believe recent bad press over remarks about the military and the president’s handling of the pandemic have drowned out his message.

According to a Yahoo News/YouGov poll released over the weekend, Biden stretched his lead over Trump to ten percent (49-39%) - a four point jump from the previous survey taken at the end of August. The pollster said one of the likely drivers of the swing was last week’s revelations that Trump deliberately downplayed the deadliness of COVID-19 during the early stages of the outbreak.

However, national surveys are less significant than statewide polls due to the nature of the Electoral College format, which requires candidates to win states - not overall popular vote. That



said, the state-level polling reveals that if the election were held today, Biden would win by an Electoral College landslide.

Biden leads in eight of the top 10 largest battleground states, the sum of which account for nearly 35% of all electoral votes. Biden's lead is under three percent, however, in three of those states: Florida (+1.2), Ohio (+2.4), and North Carolina (+0.8), according to the RCP averages. Over the past week, Biden stretched his lead by two points in Michigan, where he is now ahead by 4.2 percent, and gained over two points in Wisconsin, extending his lead in the badger state to 6.4%. His lead has remained steady in Pennsylvania (4.3+), Minnesota (+6.4) and Arizona (+4.5) since September 4.

Trump's lead in Texas (+3.5) and Georgia (+1.3) remained steady although he did chip away at Biden's lead in Florida by a half point.

Despite his dominant positions in surveys, many believe Biden's polling numbers may not reflect the final outcome because of the way the pandemic has affected the election process. Due to COVID-19 fears, many voters will mail absentee ballots as opposed to voting in person. The problem is that a larger number of mail-in ballots are rejected compared to in-person votes, largely due to technicalities such as signature mismatches or the ballots arriving too late.

The next major events on the calendar ahead of the November 3 election are presidential debates scheduled for September 29, October 15, and October 22.

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